

A Short Essay on Scientific Exchanges between Japan and Southeast Asia

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Summary

Vietnamese studies in Japan has a relatively long history, while Japanese studies in Vietnam is still at the starting stage. In this paper I will trace the changes of the main concerns of Japanese specialists on Southeast Asia in general and on Vietnam in particular through the history, and finally express my expectations for the future development of scientific exchanges between Japanese and Vietnamese scholars.

After the Meiji Restoration, most of Japanese intellectuals and scholars concentrated their efforts on learning lessons from the Western world to serve for the pressing necessity of modernization and industrialization of the country. However, the Japanese also thought it necessary to preserve their own values and traditions of culture, and thus studied about the history and culture of Asian countries which have had close relations with Japanese traditions.

In the 1930s and the early 1940s, the Japanese concerns were increasingly shifted toward southward expansionism and finally the Japanese troops occupied the whole region of Southeast Asia. Now, Japan needed very urgently various information and knowledge to serve its southward policy and military rule in the region. For this purpose, many of Japanese scholars working on Western society, economy and laws were hastily mobilized to proceed researches on actual situation of natural resources, commercial activities, legal system etc. in Southeast Asia. In the meantime, various writings appeared to support the Japanese pan-Asianist slogans.

Since the end of World War II, many of Japanese intellectuals and scholars paid much attention to Western experiences again, in order to prevent the revival of militarism and to contribute to rapid development of economy. But, a part of the Japanese turned their eyes to Asian neighbours, especially the post-war development of young nationalism in the region, which

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was symbolized by the holding of the 1955 Bandung Conference.

In the 1960s, a new generation of researchers and students emerged who studied about Southeast Asia and Vietnam, from the sympathy with the liberation movements of the Southeast Asians and especially the Vietnamese. In the meantime, the Japanese government established some research institutes to accumulate necessary knowledge and train people to expand relations with Southeast Asian Countries.

During the 1970s, as the Japanese economic relations with Southeast Asia developed rapidly, many of Japanese intellectuals and students raised a voice against the government ODA policy and the business activities toward Southeast Asian countries.

The successive generations, namely those of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, of Japanese intellectuals and students who were much concerned about Southeast Asia shared some common tendency, i.e. a critical attitude toward the general atmosphere of the Japanese society which put an overemphasis upon USA and Europe. Instead, they had an idea that the Japanese should understand more about their own neighbours, because Japan is a member of the Asian family. Many of them also argued that the Japanese should learn much from the Asian neighbours' experiences, such as the heroic struggles of the Asian peoples against the American imperialism and for their nations' liberation.

One more thing common in Japanese concerns about Southeast Asia is unilateral tendency of their approach. In other words, the results of their studies have been mainly to serve for the Japanese society and people. But, more recently some efforts of bilateral tendency have started. We can expect the future development of this kind of efforts so that mutual benefits can be brought to both the Japanese and the Southeast Asians (Vietnamese). Furthermore, we should take into consideration a possible development of new efforts toward multilateral and multinational joint research projects among Japan, Vietnam and other Asian neighbours.

Vietnamese studies in Japan has a relatively long history, while Japanese studies in Vietnam is still at the starting stage. In this paper I will trace the changes of the main concerns of Japanese specialists on Southeast Asia in general and on Vietnam in particular through the history, and finally express my expectations for the future development of scientific exchanges between Japanese and Vietnamese scholars.

If we study about any foreign country and culture, we have to ask ourselves the reasons and the purposes why we should study, and the social meanings and influences of our studies among our own society. Let me start with the case of Japanese concerns about foreign countries and cultures in the Meiji era.

1. Japanese Concerns on Vietnam and Southeast Asia after the Meiji Restoration

After the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese leaders raised “modernization” as a top priority of national policy, the slogan of which was “rich country, strong soldiers” [Fukoku kyohei] and “increase of production and promotion of industries” [Shokusan kogyo]. “Modernization” meant “Westernization” for the Japanese of that time, therefore most of Japanese intellectuals and scholars tried hard to study about Western countries, draw useful knowledge and technology from Western experiences and apply them onto the modernization process in Japan. They regarded that “enlightenment of civilization” [Bunmei kaika] was actually identical with the efforts to understand and master the most developed knowledge and technology of European countries and USA. In other words, the main concerns of Japanese intellectuals and scholars since the Meiji Restoration were Western culture, society, economy and politics, etc..

However, the Japanese also had a thinking that they should preserve the fundamental values and fine traditions of their own culture, even though they had to urgently study modern knowledge and technology from the Western world. This kind of thinking was paraphrased as a slogan of “Japanese soul and Western technics” [Wakon yosai]. In order to respect traditional values and culture of Japan, they should not study only Japanese history and culture, but Asian history, cultures and religions, especially those of China and India, which had had very strong impacts on the formation of Japanese cultural traditions.

From this point of view, a part of Japanese scholars got interested in the history and cultures of Southeast Asia, especially Vietnam. They studied the history of the “Southern Area” [Nanpo] and “Annam” [An’nan] mainly basing on classic Chinese books.

2. Japanese Concerns on Southeast Asia and Vietnam during the War Period

In the second half of the 1930s, the leaders of the Japanese government and military enhanced their concerns about Southeast Asia. At that time, Japan was fighting with China, but the aspiration to include Southeast into the Japanese sphere of influence grew bigger and bigger among the leaders. This ambition of southward expansion was further fueled by the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1939. When France and Holland surrendered themselves to the Germans in 1940, the Japanese top leaders finally decided to adopt the southward policy as a most urgent national policy. The Japanese troops advanced into Indochina in 1940 and occupied the whole area of Southeast Asia by 1942.

Under these circumstances, the Japanese now found a very urgent necessity of getting information and knowledge about the actual situation of Southeast Asia, in order to proceed their

southward expansion and military administration in the area. What the Japanese wanted to know was the information and knowledge of contemporary economic, political and military situation of Southeast Asia, such as economic resources, transportation system and monetary system rather than the ancient history and cultures. The Japanese also paid much attention to economic and political activities of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, not only because those Chinese played very important role in commercial and business activities in the region, but also because many of them supported the war against Japan in mainland China.

Thus, in the latter half of the 1930s and especially during the first half of the 1940s, the study and reasearch on contemporary situation in Southeast Asia became a very pressing task for the Japanese. However, there did not exist enough scholars and any stock of knowledge in Japan at that time, because the Japanese main concerns about Southeast Asia in the earlier period had been mainly historical studies using Chinese classics.

In order to catch up the gap between the urgent and sudden necessity to study about contemporary Southeast Asia and the scarcity of competent specialists, the Japanese government and military hastily mobilized scholars and researchers about European countries, because they could read books and documents written in English, French and Dutch. For instance, a Japanese specialist on French laws was required to study about the legal system of French-Indochina, mainly basing on French books written by French scholars and colonial administrators. Thus, the “French-Indochina Studies”[Futsuin Kenkyu] was hastily started in Japan during that period.

In the meantime, the Japanese also felt the necessity to justify the slogan of the “liberation of Greater East Asia” [Daitoa kaiho] and “the Coprosperity Sphere of Greater East Asia” [Daitoa kyoeiken]. For example, such books were published in this period: books arguing cultural similarities between Japan and Southeast Asia, books emphasizing how the Southeast Asian peoples had been oppressed by Western colonialism, and books mentioning about the history of Southeast Asian struggles against Western colonial domination. Those books served for advertising to the Japanese public opinion how reasonable the Japanese southward policy and the war policy in the Asia-Pacific were.

3. Japanese Concerns on Southeast Asia and Vietnam after the Second World War

Since the end of World War II, many of Japanese intellectuals and scholars paid much attention to Western experiences again, firstly because they wanted to learn Western system of democracy in order to prevent the revival of militatism of the 1930s Japan, and secondly because they wanted to adopt Western system, know-how and technology which were to contribute to swift recovery from the war damage and rapid development of the nation’s economy. The efforts by Japanese intellectuals and scholars were devoted to serve for the policy formation of the

Japanese government as well as various activities of the Japanese business, and also to enlighten Japanese students and people about democracy, development and modernization. In other words, for the majority of the Japanese, the main subject of their concerns was once more again Western experiences.

Nevertheless, a part of the Japanese were not satisfied with this general tendency of the Japanese society and turned their eyes to Asian neighbours, especially the post-war development of young nationalism in the region, demonstrated in such incidents as Asian nations' independence, the Chinese revolution, the Vietnamese struggle against French colonialism, and the 1955 Bandung meeting of Asian and African nations.

Intellectuals and scholars opposing against the American hegemonism highly appreciated Asian peoples' struggles against the American "neo-colonialism". They wrote many books and articles in order to arouse sympathy toward neighbouring Asian nations among the Japanese public.

In the 1960s, as the Viet Nam war grew more and more intense, a new generation of researchers and students emerged who studied about Southeast Asia and Vietnam. Most of them started their studies from the sympathy with the liberation movements of the Southeast Asians and especially the Vietnamese and from the opposition against the US war policy and the Japanese Government's policy to support the US war efforts in Vietnam. The 1960s "Vietnam War generation" shared many common factors with the 1950s "Bandung generation" in their mentality and attitude.

In the meantime, external economic relations of post-war Japan put much emphasis on Southeast Asian countries. In order to develop and maintain good relations with Southeast Asian countries, the Japanese leaders understood the necessity to encourage the studies on this area. For that purpose, the Japanese government decided to establish the Institute of Developing Economies, the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (University of Kyoto), the Institute of Asian and African Languages and Cultures (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies). etc., in order to accumulate knowledge and information and train people necessary to expand relations with Southeast Asian countries.

However, as the Japanese economy developed rapidly and the Japanese economic presence became more and more visible in Southeast Asia, especially in the first years of the 1970s, not only the Southeast Asians themselves, but many of Japanese intellectuals and students also raised a voice against the Japanese government ODA policy and the Japanese business penetration toward Southeast Asian countries. Anti-Japanese demonstrations took place in Thailand and Indonesia. At the same time, many of Japanese intellectuals and scholars also started criticizing the Japanese foreign policy, especially after President Nixon's visit to China and the oil crisis. They wrote many books and articles to accuse the Japanese government's policies and the business activities in

Southeast Asia.

The successive generations, namely those of the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s, of Japanese intellectuals and students who were much concerned about Southeast Asia shared some common tendency. Almost all of them showed a critical attitude toward the general atmosphere of the Japanese society which put an overemphasis upon USA and Europe. Instead, they had an idea that the Japanese should understand more about their own neighbours, because Japan is a member of the Asian family.

Many of them also argued that the Japanese should learn much from the Asian neighbours' experiences. The most typical argument was that the Japanese should learn the heroic activities of the Asian peoples fighting against the "American imperialism", especially those of the Chinese and the Vietnamese struggling for the construction of socialism.

Furthermore, some of them had also the following discussion. "The Japanese society has lost something very precious in the process of modernization, urbanization and industrialization. While the Japanese have lost many of Asian traditions and values, other Asian countries still reserve them". The findings of something quite similar to old Japanese traditions among the societies and cultures of Asian neighbours were very exciting toward the Japanese, a matter of nostalgia and romanticism. In addition, this kind of discussion was usually accompanied by one hope, "We want the Asian neighbours to keep well fine traditions of Asia, and not to follow a bad example of Japan which has lost many valuable things in the process of modernization."

4. From Unilateralism to Bilateral Approach

I have discussed very briefly the general tendencies of Japanese concerns about Southeast Asia and Vietnam from the Meiji period to the 1970s. Although the purposes and social functions of Southeast Asian and Vietnamese studies by the Japanese have changed from one period to another, but they have a common character through all the periods. That is the fact that almost all of these studies and researches have an orientation of unilateralism. I mean by unilateralism here the tendency that these studies have a one-way character, in the sense that their main concerns are to make some contribution, in one way or another, to the Japanese people and society: for example, to help the Japanese government in decision making and implementation of policies toward Southeast Asia, or to support Japanese companies in doing business in Southeast Asian markets, or to inform the Japanese people of heroic struggles by Southeast Asian peoples, or to help the Japanese readers for further understanding about Southeast Asian history and cultures. Whatever their purpose be, the main beneficiaries of those studies and researches have been always the Japanese people and society.

In this sense, Southeast Asian studies conducted by Japanese specialists have been basically

not so far from Western studies in Japan. For the case of Western studies, their main purpose and social function have been to learn from European and American experiences, and to contribute to modernization, industrialization, and/or democratization of Japan. In one word, Western studies in Japan have been quite unilateral in its character.

This kind of observation is also applicable to the case of foreign studies in general and Japanese studies in particular which are carried out in present-day Vietnam. The most important task of those studies in Vietnam is to learn lessons from Japanese and foreign countries' experiences and to make a contribution to economic development, modernization and industrialization of their country. More concretely, Vietnamese specialists on Japan and other foreign countries have such social functions as providing Vietnamese decision makers with necessary information, knowledge, suggestions and advices; educating the Vietnamese people for understanding about Japan and other countries, etc..

In addition, the Vietnamese put much importance upon the preservation of fine traditions and values of their own culture, the slogan of which is the "ban sac dan toc" [preservation of the Nation's identity and essential values]. From this point of view, the Vietnamese are paying attention to the Japanese culture which also belongs to the family of the East Asian civilization.

In one word, Japanese studies and foreign studies by the Vietnamese today are quite unilateral in their character. Of course, I do not intend to accuse this kind of unilateralism. It is quite natural and necessary that foreign studies in any country bring benefits to their own society and people. However, what I want to emphasize here is that those studies should make efforts to include bilateral and multilateral orientation, in addition to the existing unilateral tendency.

Of course, unilateral studies can in some cases bring benefits to the society and the people of the target country. For instance, Japanese specialists of Vietnamese studies give advices and suggestions to the Japanese policy-makers and as a result, their government makes a decision of a policy favourable to the Vietnamese government and people. Books written by a Japanese specialist on Vietnam have a good influence upon the Japanese readers, so that they have a better image of Vietnam, understand the Vietnamese society and culture, thus promoting mutual understandings between the two peoples. However, those benefits which Japanese specialists on Vietnam can bring to the Vietnamese society and people are merely indirect by-products, while their main purpose is to give benefits to their own society.

What I expect here is such efforts by Japanese specialists as to make more conscious and active efforts for bringing benefits to the Vietnamese society and people, or for promoting mutual understandings between Japan and Vietnam. For instance, if a Japanese specialist on Vietnam publishes his works in Vietnamese or at least in English, but not in Japanese, or if somebody translates his book written in Japanese to Vietnamese, then the benefits can be brought

to Vietnamese scholars and readers. Another example is organizing a joint research project between Japanese and Vietnamese scholars, or a symposium where both Japanese and Vietnamese specialists exchange opinions.

Of course, we have already such experiences of translations, joint researches and symposia. And many of them have brought very satisfiable results.

First, today we have many opportunities for mutual visits and mutual exchanges, thanks to the Vietnamese Doi Moi and open-door policy, and also thanks to generous financial supports by the Japan Foundation, the Toyota Foundation, the Sumitomo Foundation and others, for promoting cultural and academic exchanges between Japan and Vietnam.

Second, the level of Vietnamese studies by Japanese specialists has been improved, to the extent where they can contribute to further development of Vietnamese studies not only in Japan, but also all over the world. If the level of Vietnamese studies by Japanese specialists was too low, the Vietnamese could not find much meanings in translation of Japanese books or in organizing joint research project with the Japanese counterparts.

Third, many Vietnamese scholars working on Vietnam's history, culture and society have been getting increasingly open-minded to the studies made by Japanese and other foreign specialists on Vietnam. Previously, Japanese scholars as well as Vietnamese scholars working on the history, culture and society of their own country had a very nationalistic and closed attitude to the works done by foreign scholars. For example, most of Japanese historians on the Japanese history believed, "It is only the Japanese who can fully understand the history, culture and society of Japan, and foreigners can never understand well about Japan. We can teach foreigners about Japan, but foreigners cannot teach us anything about Japan." In the extreme cases, some of Japanese scholars even nourished a xenophobic idea and hated foreigners' involvement in their "territory" of studies.

However, this kind of chauvinistic attitude has begun to disappear, from the 1970s (during the process of internationalization of the Japanese society) for the case of Japanese scholars, and from the 1990s (during the process of Doi Moi) for the case of Vietnamese scholars. Now, many of Japanese historians on the Japanese history, for example, have well understood that foreigners' works on the Japanese history can provide various useful insights and suggestions which Japanese historians have not thought of, can provide various precious information from archives in foreign countries which Japanese historians could not find out inside the country, and so forth. Thus, most of Japanese historians today are very willing to listen to the voices of foreign scholars and even respect their opinions. I believe that the majority of Vietnamese scholars on the history, culture and society of Vietnam have today a similar attitude toward foreign scholars.

The bilateral approach is not only confined to translations, joint research projects and

symposia. Another example is the contribution of Japanese specialists on Vietnam to development of Japanese studies in Vietnam. Of course, Japanese specialists on Vietnam are in most cases not specialists on Japan. In a due course, Japanese specialists on Vietnam cannot write a qualified book or give a high-level lecture on Japan.

Even so, however, Japanese specialists on Vietnamese studies have some strong points. First, they understand much what kind of information and knowledge on Japan are necessary right now for Vietnam. Second, they are very much concerned about the development of Vietnam and very willing to devote their time and energy to contribute to the society and the academic circle of Vietnam. Third, they have a command of the Vietnamese language necessary to communicate with the Vietnamese counterparts. For those reasons, they can offer some introductory lectures and writings about Japan to the Vietnamese.

In addition, Japanese specialists on Vietnamese studies have usually many Japanese friends who are specialists on Japanese studies. Therefore, they can play a bridging role between Japanese scholars on Japanese studies and Vietnamese scholars interested in Japanese studies. For instance, they can introduce any appropriate professors of Japanese studies to Vietnamese scholars and students who want to do researches in Japan. My colleagues and myself have already acted this kind of intermediary role on many occasions.

Our hope is that the level of Japanese studies by Vietnamese scholars will become higher day by day and finally the Vietnamese specialists on Japanese studies will reach the extent in which they can manage their activities even without the supports of Japanese researchers on Vietnamese studies. In actuality, there exist some Vietnamese who had come to Japan from South Vietnam before 1975 to study in Japanese universities and have become now very excellent scholars on the Japanese history and society, who have enough command of the Japanese language and whose works have been highly appreciated by Japanese specialists on Japanese studies. We hope that many Vietnamese of younger generation will soon grow up to be as competent as those pioneers.

Another effort toward the bilateral direction is also promising. That is to organize a joint research project where Japanese specialists on Vietnamese studies, Japanese specialists on Japanese studies, Vietnamese specialists on Vietnamese studies, and Vietnamese specialists on Japanese studies work together. The most adequate research topics for this purpose must be either the comparison or the relations: for instance, they can work together for comparative studies of cultural elements, social phenomena, or historical experiences; for researches on diplomatic and/or cultural relations between the two countries.

It is true that some of joint research projects of comparison or relations have been already organized. But in many cases, those were merely joint ventures between Japanese specialists of Vietnamese studies and Vietnamese specialists of Vietnamese studies. In some cases, those

projects were established simply for the purpose to get financial support from Japanese sponsoring organizations.

In order to proceed more satisfactorily joint research projects of comparison or relations, we need to invite the participation of Japanese specialists on Japanese studies. Furthermore, Japanese and Vietnamese participants should share a common recognition that we are striving for a common aim: mutual understanding between the two nations, contribution to happiness and progress not only of Japan and Vietnam, but of our region and our world.

5. Future Development of Unilateralism

What I expect is not only the future development of bilateralism, but also multilateral approach which involves various specialists from various countries. One of the existing examples is the case of research project on royal court music in Hue. This project was started in 1994 with the participation of Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean and Chinese specialists of musicology as well as Japanese and Vietnamese specialists on Vietnamese history and culture. The Japanese specialists of musicology and those of Vietnamese history and culture soon learnt a pressing necessity of preserving the precious traditions, and persuaded the Japanese government to provide financial supports to establish a Nha Nhac course in the Hue College of Arts.

However, the Japanese participants were not satisfied to stop at this stage. They made further efforts toward the direction of multilateralism, and with the collaboration of Korean counterparts, held an international symposium in Seoul in 1997 where many scholars and musicians participated from Vietnam and China as well as from Japan and South Korea. Now, the East Asian cultural community has paid much attention to the preservation of royal court music traditions of Hue, because many people regard that those traditions are not only the heritage of the Vietnamese people, but a common heritage of East Asia and the world, therefore it is not only the Vietnamese but also other nations of East Asia who should undertake the task to preserve the precious traditions. This kind of common recognition has led to a common effort which involves many people from various countries.

I believe that many similar efforts of multilateral and multi-national character will come out in the near future, stemming from the common recognition shared by various persons of various countries in the world, of which we are the members.